

Editor's Note:

Ever since databases became the way to keep track of donor information, people have been asking us "What is the best software?" By "best" they generally meant cheap, easy to use, able to sort through donors and tell you which one was most likely to make a large gift that day, required no maintenance, and would never go out of date and need to be upgraded! Well, we don't know such a program, and hope readers will tell us if they ever find such a thing.

We have been asked this question so frequently, we finally decided to create a comparison chart of the databases that we know are most in use by grassroots organizations. For those of you who are brand new to the world of fundraising databases, this chart gives you a place to start, because you can quickly see what features and functions you might want to look for in good donor management software. The items included on this chart are some of the features that many grassroots organizations have found that they needed. If you don't know what a particular feature is, ask about it to find out if it is something that you might need.

We know that as soon as we put it on our site, something about it will be out of date, as the software business changes every day. This is not a complete review of all fundraising software, but rather takes popular, and for the most part, most affordable, software packages and looks at their similarities and differences.

Please note that some features such as "Password Protection", "Volunteer Management" and "Event Tracking" cannot be adequately explained in a format like this. For example, "Password Protection" can be as simple as requiring a password to enter any part of the database to as complex as having different levels of security that allow some people to access names and contact information of donors, but not to their giving history. We encourage you to give feedback on this chart, and from time to time, we will revise and update it. We strongly recommend that you do not make a selection based *solely* on this chart: instead use the information provided here to determine what you most need from software, and which company might be able to provide it, and then visit their website and call their salespeople. Ask people who are using any of the software you're considering to find out what they like and don't like about the program.

Remember, there are many variables in choosing software. Price is an important one. However, remember that the base price of a software package may be very affordable, but by the time you add the modules you need, train the people who will be using the software, and pay for technical support, you can spend a lot more money.

We hope this chart gives you a good place to start your research for a fundraising database that meets your needs. The chart was put together by Amanda Ballard, and we owe her an enormous debt of gratitude as none of us realized how complicated something like this was going to be.

